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Oral History- Iris Twigg Interviewed by Barbara Skryja on 11/6/1999

This is November 6th Green Valley History Day.

IT: Iris Twigg is my name. I was a teacher and a teacher director at Oak Grove Head start at Green Valley School from 1966-1973. There were very exciting years, a lot was happening in the world and the answer for many of felt that the answer would be giving young preschool children a head start educational at the same time working closely with the parents to improve and power and support their parenting skills for their little ones. When children are tiny parents are opened to suggestions, the whole future of the child lies ahead the potential for being a deep sea deeper, or whatever the potential is there. So parents at of children of three four and five are very opened to suggestions and supports and how young parents needed support. So it was a joy to work with the families.
BS: Great thank you.
IT: I'm a 3rd generation Californian born in the Bay area. And let's see here what else did you wanted to know. Go ahead.
BS: How did you become an educator what is your experience?
IT: I went to the University of California back in the late 40's early 50's and majored in child development also speaking Spanish was something that I adorned in high school and took a class at Cal and failed it but it was still a part of me and when I came to the head start program half the families to often two thirds were Spanish speaking I found that…I managed to recreate my high school Spanish successes with the help of the parents always. I could communicate. I couldn't communicate philosophy or big ocean of ideas but I could speak specifics clearly. Maybe not directly but I would beat around the bush and I would get there. So the dream of educating the education of working with preschool children using my Spanish just all came to together. I had worked before that Sonoma State University when it was brand new. I worked at an assistant to personal manager when Sonoma State center in old apartment building in Rohnert Park. George McKay hailed me one day he was a teacher with the university and told me about needing applicants for the head start jobs and there was an intensive training in south California but I would be interested in applying and seeing if I applying to see if I qualified and I said yes, and that's how I started. That was more detail then I think you need. I get off on tangents.
BS: No that's great. So you applied and you were accepted and you actually went to school in Southern California in this program?
IT: It was an intensive two week training period and it was a huge, I don't remember how many people were there mostly, mostly women very few men. Maybe five hundred to a thousand people broken into small groups. Lots and lots of information. The neat thing about head start was the melding having to obey by the performing standards which included health and dental, if the child needed a physical examination we were mandated to serve a small percentage with children who had handicapped situations we had everything from what is the mental handicapped that little ones have, the extreme, I can't think of the word. Mental retardation was the phased used, I'm not being very articulated. But we did serve children with handicapped conditions, those could be visional, audibly, discipline, or mental retardation.

BS: how did you come to the head start program at Green Valley school? How did you get assigned there?
IT: I have no idea. I have no idea. I don't know if I had a choice, but they needed a staff out there. I think that I was interviewed, and Al Carneila, the principle of the school of… in Graton was instrumental in getting the head start program to the Green Valley School. He and George McKay were two folks who were instrumental in getting the program in the county.
BS: Where you the first teacher to come to?
IT: I was the first teacher, and there was a head teacher also, an imaginative women who had from the east coast, she had been trained in Chicago, I'm trying to remember there was a social activist who was one of her mentors and her teacher too, so the involve of the community and the parents in the program was the absolute bases of our program.
BS: You found the students for your program through the Oak Grove district. Who suggested the children who came to your program?
IT: We had I think endearments flyers, I think we literally went door to door knocking in the community. Even way back then in the 1960's, we were able no seat belts were required, we could pick up children from far ranches and could often pile six seven eight children in the car and bought them to school. But Hassel Davis was the officially bus drive she drove buses for .. school students and she also made runs of us in the district. The children we picked up were out of the district. We were always needed to work to get our enrollment to get the 35 student level. We had two sessions, we worked year around. Many of the Spanish speaking families partially used our center during the summer when the families were very business harvest, apples, cherries, and hops, etc. In the winter time, the population was smaller because many Mexican families took the time went there was little work with the crops to return to their houses in Mexico to visit. Does give you any perspective at all?
BS: That's great.
IT: Any more questions, your questions help.
BS: Did you live around the Green Valley area?
IT: I did, I lived in Santa Rosa, and so I commuted every day. It was also the time of the morning star ranch up in the hills. There was a different aurora to the whole world in the 60's and 70's. I think…It was one just did…Santa Rosa over to Occidental to the Ranch, the Morning Star Ranch, the Coast, giving someone a ride is just something that you did. The mix of Anglo families and alternative lifestyle families often parents very well educated. And the mix of Mexican American family was quite a challenging constrict when we had parent meetings. We always had translations. But the hippies were something, the Mexican American community and some of the other Anglo families felt that were was a little danger in the hippie parents. Drugs were a terrible fear. One mother told her little boy that the hippies…anything to put terror in the Lord in the little boy. So bridging those gaps were challenging. It was very real, the fear was very real. Bridging was challenging and very exciting.
BS: Did the families learn to trust one another after they came to this?
IT: In general, they put on incredible dances every year to raise money. We used the money to buy winter jackets for the children. They were held at the Grange out on Sebastopol Rd, most of the dances were there, with local bands and live music. And potluck, lots and lots of

food getting contributions from the community…I think 10% of our expensive had to be represented by donations and contributions to the program. So the annual dance was a marvelous opportunity to solicited donations from the business community in Forestville and Sebastopol and so on.
BS: Did you want speak…?
IT: I don't know, its kind of dry. It's most like a college paper. But I could read a paragraph. I wish that I read it first but I didn't. Shall I do that?
BS: Sure
IT: First we are a rule housed in a classic two-room high ceiling schoolhouse. We built on ashes in 1928 where the originally school was built in 1840. Small but an important local piece of history. Like me grandmother went here. Its on not a through road two sides Gravestein…one side, one…names of old timers have a certain flavor, Maxism, Flecter,…Perry, Thomas. All orchard and stock men way back. The school was set up for children six to fourteen years. And our young'in are three and four. We tighter the space up some making cozy corners but mostly the rooms are open. The kids seemed to operate well in the vast area. We are the only Head start in the county that had so much space others being housed in squeezed space tight rooms. I and then I go into great detail defining the children and their families. Out of the thirty ones families for instance, ten of them, ten families…thirty one families are complete family units with mother and father. And include all fifteen of Mexican American families, two Filipino families, one Portuguese families, and ten causian English speaking families. We can serve children for two years. That was sometimes marvelous because we could really get know and work with the parents. There are ten single parents families, all female headed. Nine are causan. The work of the families, this was low income program, poverty program they say. Two fathers work at Sonoma State College as grounds man, orchard and cannery, fishing all seasonal account for living for all fifteen men. One father is a dairy worker, and there was occasional…musicians,…security guard one father. Nineteen families received welfare.
BS: Was this a typical profile? Or was this a profile for a specific year?
IT: This was a specific year and it varied a bit, but it was a pretty good thumb nail stretch of the poverty but geography, but the demographics. That was a thumb nail stretch. Does that give you anything at all?
BS: And we were speaking earlier, about trying to follow up, and all the children as they enter the public school?
IT: I remember mostly, I think. The fact that the head start children in the elementary schools, did beautiful in kindergarten, first and second grade, and then begin to fall back in reading. I guess that is the critical measuring in that. I don't know, I was able to get …I personally firmly believe that for a Spanish speaking children this elementary school should offer part of there key curriculum, part of them, in both English and Spanish until about the third grade. Even though a little one, a Spanish speaking children, is fairly fluent in English and understands fairly well there are subtleties, intelligently that are … I know that the big folks that held the program nationally have felt that head start in generally has been a very successful program. It only serves a few children is not the way to go. We need to make it an universal program, not

just for low income families. Spread it out. There is so much that needs to be done in these earlier years.
BS: How did the program end? Was the federal government responsible for ending the funding in partially this school?
IT: Demographics changes and populations were partially responsible. Two centers were closed down, one up in the mountains near the up on the coast on the reservation there. They had conducted a program for ten fifteen years now. Centers were shut down and new centers were established in places were there was a little easier concentrate for eligible children. The programs in south park and Heladsburg, Windsor, and Santa Rosa have stayed steady and the there location and I don't know where they are. The funds are continued, year to year. Year to year funding. People used to worry, we wouldn't have the money, and what would we do. We just keep picking them and put them down and the money would come. Its still there, its still being funded. The congress just have a soft place in their heart for the little children. But it could be a universal program. That could be the goal I think.
BS: As the program ended? And you had mentioned the year. What did you do? You personally. Did you go on to something else?
IT: I went to the administration end at head start in Santa Rosa, and was an educational specialist.
BS: What year was that?
IT: I think it was about 1997. It was '77 until '80, it lasted about four years. There new a director was hired, and was made deputy director at that time. So I assisted in administration. And missed the teaching in a way, even though it was exhausting. The teaching was very very draining and exciting. Are you a teacher?
BS: No, I have not taught. But my children went to El Milino and parent participate nursery school.
IT: That was a really good program.
BS: It was an excellent program and Tonya…was the teacher then.
IT: We used to have high school kids from El Milino that were come and get credit…through the high school effort. I'm still in touch with a couple of them
BS: Do you remember who these children were?
IT: You know, I don't remember…It was exciting. The curriculum was a lots of fun. There was lots of cooking, lots of eating, lots of playing in the mud, and with real clay. We had a marvelous teacher who had a pottery wheel. Lots of nature walks that was an important thing. Gather callipillars and eating them. Nature was all around that school, part of its glory.
BS: I think that's one of the things were trying to emphasis in this activity. Currently what do you do?
IT: I'm retired, I have been for a lot of year. I write and take photographs. Life is very good…I tried to re visit the hall and was unable to connect with the residents. I forget what year it was, but a small group of children we drive up where an enormous buckeye tree and the big buckeyes were everywhere. It was a canopy, it was a huge enomorous tree, it was at least 60 feet in gruth and 40 feet high and just spread an umbrella and the children underneath it was an incredible experience, for me too. I didn't know how buckeyes tree grow, but there was large thick strains like vines that my mind tells me that it was a part of the buckeyes tree. The

children were swinging from the vines. It was magical. Its still, but from that …you can look up and see Green Valley school, we could see the playground and the tree house, and all the equipment and the cars. When we got back we drew a map, and the little ones, high hill, and what they saw and where we were. I enjoyed that with children at that age. It was a gift, beautiful stuff.

BS: Do any of your students correspond with you, have you meet up with them?

IT: I have stayed in touch with several families, it was been two or three times a year. They are part of my family, but yet not part of my family. The fondness of the memory of our time.

BS: How old are some of these students that you still?

IT: Danny was four in 1966…he is thirty four.

BS: And his last name is?

IT: Lucille. A very successive young man.

BS: For an example can you tell me what he does?

IT: He is a driver for the airporter, or one of these airport express. He drives people to San Francisco, he is a delightful young man.

BS: Does he also have family now?

IT: Yeah, he has children. He is married, yeah. He is my key contact. Just a handful of families I keep in contact with, about ten.

BS: That's nice to keep that contact going. And that young woman that came today.

IT: And she is one of those. Yolanda Millan. And her momma and papa live in the area, but I don't know actually were.

BS: Did she bring some materials too?

IT: I just wanted to say that my teacher, the teacher who was working with me was Alexandra Holmes, and we an incredible skilled teacher and Sally Zoefella. Unbelievable teacher, gentle and quieting. She could quiet the most upset child. Not by kiss, but just thinking of something the children liked to do very much and saying well how would you like that. Tom Gopella, Mary Hertez. Those are pretty key folks. That's enough I think. Its not through. Its enough to for your project.

BS: Thank you for sharing.